



## News Release

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## Utah Plans to Drastically Reduce Teen Pregnancies

*State, Partners to Increase Education and Resources for Teens and Families*

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) has set an ambitious new goal to cut the state's teen pregnancy rate by 20 percent by the year 2015. In 2004, nearly four of every 100 girls ages 15-19 were pregnant. A 20 percent reduction would bring the number down to just over three pregnancies per 100 teens in that age group.

“When girls have babies as teens, their futures can change drastically,” said Jennifer Mayfield, Adolescent Health Coordinator, UDOH. “Their risk for living in poverty, relying on welfare and other government programs, and dropping out of school greatly increases. The chance of their children growing up and continuing the cycle also increases,” she said.

At 3.9 pregnancies per 100 teen girls, Utah's rate is well below the national rate of 8.5 per 100. American teens have more babies per capita than any other industrialized nation.

There is some good news, though. Teen pregnancy rates have fallen more than 20 percent in Utah and the U.S. over the last decade. But there are several areas in Utah, including Midvale, Rose Park, Glendale and downtown Ogden, where rates are alarmingly high, exceeding even national rates. When broken down by race and ethnicity, the highest rates occur among Hispanic/Latina girls.

The UDOH and its partners have a plan to stop so many young girls from getting pregnant. The Utah Adolescent Health Network, a coalition of individuals and community groups, is developing a plan to get critical education and resources to teens and families. New population estimates show the number of adolescents in Utah will grow by more than 33,000 by 2015.

“With a large number of Utah children always progressing along life's path, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, we all need to educate our boys and girls, and young men and women, about prevention and the importance of taking personal responsibility for their sexual behavior,” said Dr. David Sundwall, Executive Director, UDOH.

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The UDOH and its partners will help educate teens and families by directing federal funds for the Utah Abstinence Education Program to eight community-based programs, including Colors of Success, the Community Building Community Initiative of Midvale City, Pregnancy Resource Center of Salt Lake, University of Utah, Worldwide Organization for Women and three local health departments.

A critical part of the program will be to help parents help their teens delay sexual activity. Many studies have shown that parents play a key role in pregnancy prevention. And teens who say they have high-quality relationships with their parents are more likely to make responsible choices.

“Parents need to be open and honest about their values regarding early sexual activity,” said First Lady Mary Kaye Huntsman. “Teens whose parents monitor their behavior through supervision and rules about dating and outside activities are more likely to make responsible sexual choices.”

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy offers several more tips for parents to help stop the cycle of babies having babies.

- 1) Talk with children early and often about issues regarding teen sex and pregnancy.
- 2) Show them options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.
- 3) Know your children’s friends and their families.
- 4) Let your children know that you value education very highly.

Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., has offered his support for the new goal by declaring May 3 as Teen Pregnancy Prevention Day in Utah. In addition, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has declared May as Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month. The campaign has developed a quiz for teens that presents real-life scenarios involving risky situations and asks them to choose a course of action. Youth can find the quiz at <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/>.

For more information on teen pregnancy prevention efforts in Utah, please contact Jennifer Mayfield at [jmayfield@utah.gov](mailto:jmayfield@utah.gov) or by calling 801-538-9317. Additional tips and information can be found at <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/tips/default.asp>.

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